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AUTHOR Renegar, Sandra L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses survey results from 68 assistant professors concerning the following areas: (1) their experiences with the promotion process; (2) the state of the respondents' publication writing skills; (3) their publication records; and (4) the nature of institutional support. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents did not consider the professional publication process a deterrent to pursuing promotion. On a Likert scale from 1, meaning not at all prepared, to 5 for very well prepared, approximately 40 percent rated their present preparation at 4 or above; 60 percent rated it a 3 or below. Forty of the 68 assistant professors reported their terminal degree program provided no training specifically designed to develop publication skills. Regardless of their perceived writing skills, 58 percent of those surveyed are engaged in some form of research that they anticipate will lead to publication. Results from this survey suggest that graduate programs contain little, if any, formal provision for publication writing by students. The paper suggests that it is important for administrators to determine if such programs adequately prepare graduates for their professional future. (GLR)

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Writing for Publication:

Are Junior Faculty Prepared?

by

Sandra L. Renegar, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Elementary & Special Education
Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
Ph. 314-651-2445
FAX No. 314-651-2410

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

When scanning the positions advertised in **The Chronicle of Higher Education**, the reader is sure to see among the qualifications required "strong evidence of scholarly achievement or potential" or "demonstrated record of publication in refereed journals." Although the publish or perish mentality is undergoing reexamination in higher education, the fact is most junior faculty must measure up to such standards if they expect to be tenured or promoted.

What are the experiences with publication writing of junior faculty at a regional university? How well prepared for that part of the job requirement are new faculty? As assistant professors, do the demands on faculty foster prolific writing? This article will describe a survey of assistant professors at a regional state university and their experiences with publication writing.

Who publishes?

Material promoting the sale of a book on writing for publication trumpeted that ninety-five percent of the publishing is done by only five percent of the writers (**Phi Delta Kappa** 1991). "In the modern university, the most distinguished scholars or researchers commonly do the least teaching" (Smith, p. 179). Lynne Cheney's 1990 report on what's wrong in American education (cited in Corbett, 1992) indicated that "because of the need to engage in research and publication in order to survive in academia, many senior professors make themselves scarce in the undergraduate classroom" (p. 113).

In a large research university, the teaching responsibilities frequently fall to graduate students serving as teaching assistants thus freeing faculty to engage in research and professional writing. In smaller universities with a stated mission of regional service, fewer teaching assistants are available and faculty typically carry full teaching loads. Administrators may release some faculty from teaching a course to pursue a project; others may utilize grant money to obtain "release time" for professional growth activities. Faculty just getting started in higher education are probably not the ones being freed of teaching responsibilities. That reality makes the challenge to publish even greater.

Jalongo's (1985) summary of data on faculty productivity reported "one consistent theme ... is that professors who publish early in their careers (even while still in graduate school) tend to continue scholarly activity throughout their tenure at an institution" (p. 175). Given the demands on junior faculty, especially in regional universities, beginning professionals who have not

established publication writing as a normative behavior would be more likely to have a difficult time with publishing.

Rationale for study:

Nothing can drive home the "publish or perish" expectations of an institution on a faculty member quite as effectively as being denied tenure or promotion because of lack of "professional growth " (read that as publication). When I was denied promotion a few years ago, I first tried to assuage my bruised ego and then thought long and hard about my weakness in that area.

As I examined my own background in writing, I realized that I had absolutely no notion about how to go about writing for publication. In my doctoral program at a fine research institution, I had received no encouragement in that direction. In class, I wrote some course papers and, of course, a dissertation, but all of us know those kinds of writing are typically unsuitable for journal publication. When I began my first job as a college teacher, I didn't have time to revise my thesis into a format suitable for publication right away. Since conventional wisdom dictates that a dissertation topic is like unrefrigerated fish and deteriorates rapidly, the window of opportunity for using that topic quickly evaporated.

To attempt to remediate my weakness in publication writing, I attended a writers' workshop. In my interaction with other participants there I discovered that many had experiences in graduate school similar to mine. That is, they had received little or no experience in writing for publication. Those who had published during graduate school typically did so as a result of mentoring by a faculty member rather than as part of a course. I wondered how colleagues at my own university compared to what I was hearing from other workshop participants.

Survey Procedure

Since junior faculty with the rank of assistant professor are likely to be tenure track and eligible for pursuing future promotion, this survey zeroed in on that segment of the university population. The study subjects were identified by obtaining a current list of all assistant professors from the provost's office. Using this information 107 faculty members were sent a letter explaining the purpose of the study, and a twenty-five question survey to be completed and returned by a designated deadline. The survey also allowed subjects to write a brief subjective analysis of university expectations, identifying areas of concern.

By the first mailing deadline, forty three (40%) of the surveys had been completed and returned. A second mailing was sent to the subjects who had not responded previously. Identification of these subjects was made possible through the use of identification numbers encoded on the surveys returned. This system was used exclusively for facilitating follow-up mailings. As a result, an additional twenty-three (21%) of the 107 surveys were completed and returned. A third mailing was not initiated, leaving the overall response rate at 64% or sixty-eight surveys returned.

Results

The survey instrument examined four general areas. These included experiences with the promotion process, state of the respondents' publication writing skills, their publication records, and the nature of institutional support.

Of the sixty-eight respondents, nearly two-thirds (65%) had not gone through the promotion process at our university but they did not consider the professional publication requirement a deterrent to pursuing promotion. Slightly over half of these forty-two faculty members (57%) did plan to stand for promotion within the next five years.

The survey instrument used a five point Likert type scale for respondents to rate their present level of preparation for publication writing. The scale ranged from 1 for not at all prepared to 5 for very well prepared. Approximately 40% rated their present preparation at 4 or above; 60% rated it at 3 or below. Experiences in their doctoral program may have contributed to their reported confidence level. Forty of the sixty-eight sample subjects (59%) reported their terminal degree program provided no training specifically designed to develop publication writing skills. For those twenty-eight receiving training, mentors served as the most frequently reported source of assistance.

Regardless of their perceived writing skills, most of the faculty surveyed (58%) are engaged in some form of research that they anticipate will lead to publication. This small majority leaves a sizable number who are not currently involved in a project which they consider to have publication potential.

The publication records of the faculty in the sample indicated this activity had room for growth. Slightly over half (54%) had not published an article within the last two years. This is more than double the proportion (21.6%) of public university faculty nationwide who reported no professional writings accepted for publication or published in the previous two years (**The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac,** 1993). This national total would

include both research and regional universities where faculty expectations vary. Publication in the immediate future looks even bleaker. Over three fourths of the respondents (79%) had not produced manuscripts for submission within the next academic year. Even more (82%) reported no manuscripts currently in press.

A minority of the sample (38%) divulged they had experienced institutional support for their professional writing efforts. This support included primarily informal encouragement and/or collaboration with a colleague either in the same department or from another university. The majority of respondents (56%) indicated they had not received support for their publication endeavors. If the university offered special assistance for professional writing, three fourths said they would definitely utilize such services. Workshops and/or mentor programs were cited as the most favorable services that could be offered.

On the open-ended portion of the survey instrument, one factor appeared consistently related to nonpublication. TIME! Faculty felt they did not have enough of it when trying to balance a full teaching schedule with writing requirements necessary for promotion. On this regional state university campus faculty teaching loads include nine to twelve hours each semester. Faculty new to campus may have to prepare for three to four new courses. Open-ended items produced such comments such as "I don't anticipate having the time to write until summer (and then only if I don't get coerced into teaching)" or "Be more liberal with release time - If they want us to publish they should give us loads like faculty at 'research' universities have (6-9 hrs.)."

Implications

Most higher education faculty acknowledge publication as a requirement for professional advancement. By the time they complete their terminal degree, all have written numerous course papers to convey their knowledge of selected content but not all have engaged in writing for publication.

Is this a weakness in many doctoral programs? Should graduate programs encourage and/or require students to submit manuscripts for publication? Should faculty collaborate with their students on publication writing? Based on what junior faculty at my institution report, the answer is yes to all of the above questions.

Many institutions provide instruction to graduate students serving as teaching assistants in an attempt to ensure the development of at least rudimentary teaching skills. Thus, these individuals who enter tenure-track

teaching positions do so with some readiness for the teaching portion of the professional triad in higher education.

Preparation for writing for publication, however, is less certain. Institutions could enhance their programs by including opportunities for doctoral students to engage in preparing manuscripts for journal submission. Although adding a course specifically targeted at this kind of writing would benefit students for their professional futures, these kinds of experiences could be integrated into existing courses more practically. As many authorities on the writing process have observed, writers need to reach an authentic audience. What better audience do graduate students have than their professors and fellow grad students! Feedback from these readers would provide invaluable information in the preparation of a manuscript for publication submission.

The results of the survey of assistant professors described in this article suggest that graduate programs contain little, if any, formal provision for publication writing by students. If that is the case, then do these programs adequately prepare graduates for their professional future? Good question. Administrators and faculty of graduate programs would do well to attempt to answer it.

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